

The Servant Son of God

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A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the second Sunday after Epiphany, January 14, 1990. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-34.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

A few weeks ago Bob Bush shared with me a letter to an insurance company from a man hurt in a job related accident. This is what it said:

Dear Sir:

I am writing in response to your request for additional information. In block number three of the accident reporting form, I put "trying to do the job alone" as the cause of my accident. You said in your letter that I should explain more fully, and I trust that the following details will be sufficient.

I am a bricklayer by trade. On the date of the accident, I was working alone on the roof of a new six story building. When I completed my work, I discovered that I had about 500 pounds of bricks left over. Rather than carry the bricks down by hand, I decided to lower them in a barrel by using a pulley which, fortunately, was attached to the side of the building at the sixth floor.

Securing the rope at ground level, I went up to the roof, swung the barrel out, and loaded the brick into it. Then I went back to the ground and untied the rope, holding it tightly to insure a slow descent of the 500 pounds of brick. You will note in block number eleven of the accident form I weigh 135 pounds. Due to my surprise of being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rather rapid rate up the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the third floor, I met the barrel coming down. This explains the fractured skull and broken collarbone. Slowed only slightly, I continued my rapid ascent, not stopping until the fingers of my right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley. Fortunately, by this time I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold tightly to the rope in spite of my pain.

At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel weighed approximately fifty pounds. I refer you again to my weight in block number eleven. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the building. In the vicinity of the third floor, I met the barrel coming up. This accounts for the fractured ankles and,

fortunately, only three vertebrae were cracked.

I am sorry to report, however, that as I lay there on the bricks - in pain, unable to stand, and watching the empty barrel six stories above me - I again lost my presence of mind - and - I let go of the rope. The empty barrel, weighing more than the rope, came down and broke both my legs.

I hope I have furnished the information you require as to how the accident occurred.

Trying to do the job alone. That's what so often happens. We get hurt.

It's especially true in the church. Ministers, elders, deacons, Sunday

School teachers, mothers, fathers... sometimes try to do the work of the Lord alone and get seriously hurt. We burn out.¹ Some of you once served

the Lord as a Sunday School teacher, an elder, a deacon, or in some other capacity and you got hurt, you burned out and you've backed off. You said

you'd teach for a year. At the end of the year the Christian Ed chairperson came to you and said, "We can't find anybody to take your place. Will you

teach for another year?" Soon, years had gone by with no one to help and you reached your limit. You simply burned out because others didn't step in

to serve the Lord. You became one man casualty caused by trying to do the work of the Lord alone.

That's what happens when we fail to realize that the Lord has called each one of us to be servants of the Lord.² The whole church is called by to

serve the Lord. Not just the elders. Not just the deacons, but all who have been called by Jesus Christ into Christ's church. Flip Wilson, the

comedian, was once asked what his religion was. He responded, "I'm a Jehovah's Bystander." "A Jehovah's Bystander? What do you mean?"

"Well," Flip said, "They wanted me to be a witness, but I didn't want to get involved." He had it right. If we're not involved in the work of Christ we're bystanders. God has called each one of us to serve the Lord.

Think for a moment what it means to be a servant of the Lord. A slave or a servant in the days of Isaiah was a person who had lost everything in

this world. She had lost her liberty, her will, even her name. Perhaps she was a person of worth until she was sold in the market like an animal. In the market a price was put on her neck and people bargained for her. When a slave was taken home, a hole was made in his or her ear and a ring inserted with the name of the owner on it. The slaves even lost their own names. A slave had lost every freedom. He or she was not paid for the work they did; he or she was the property of the owner. He or she had to work from morning to night. The owner had all power over the slave.

So we too. We're bought with a price by Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. We're not our own. We're like the servant who was bought in the market. Jesus died, not only to forgive our sins, but to buy us on the slave auction block, to make us his willing servants.^{One difficult "De Kuyper" concept...} The risen Christ wants to work his will in the world through us. Albert Schweitzer once said, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found a way to serve."

The main purpose of the church is to display the splendor of the Lord we worship. "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendour." *That's the main purpose of the church. That's what New Church has called its servants are to do - display.* And how do we display the splendor of the Lord? When Kay and I went to England and Scotland the year after we were married we went through more cathedrals than Kay wants to remember. I was awed at the beauty of these buildings that directed my heart and mind upward to God, the vaulted ceilings, the flying buttresses, the stained glass windows, the high altar. They're magnificent buildings that testified to the faith of our ancestors. The care and expense and the time that were put into those buildings in some way testify that the Lord was the most important reality in the lives

of those people.

And yet those cathedrals for all their beauty are not where you'll find the splendor of the Lord most clearly displayed. It was in the form of a servant, in the form of Jesus Christ, that the Lord God unveiled his splendor and fulfilled the divine purpose for humanity. Where do we see the splendor of the Lord more brilliantly displayed? "On the cross where Jesus, the Lamb of God, died."

We're part of the Body of Christ in Oxford. Our primary purpose is to display the splendour of the Lord and the way we do this is through service to others: to those in the church who are hurting, who need to be restored and brought back. But also to those outside the church. We display the splendor of the Lord by being a light in the darkness... by allowing ourselves to be the vehicles through which the love and justice of Jesus Christ is expressed in the world.

This morning we ordain and install new elders and deacons. God has called them and prepared them for their work. He's given each one of them unique gifts to be used in the service of Christ. But they can't do it alone. They need your help.

Let us pray: Before we were born you called us, O Lord; you prepare, sharpen, and polish each one of us for your service. In us you display your splendor. You have formed us to be your servant. We recommit ourselves to serve in Christ's name. May your Spirit empower us for the tasks that await.

Prayers of the People

Redeemer of your people Israel, and of us, you sent your servant as a light to the nations. His salvation reaches to the ends of the earth. He taught as one with authority; his wisdom enlightens our way. He was bruised for our sakes and intercedes on our behalf. He served others as a sign of your love; he offers hope to all who are in need. You are God forever, benevolent, compassionate, and full of purpose. What you create, you do not abandon. Wondrous God, we come to you with thanksgiving. Incline your ear to our prayer, and look with favor on our requests.

We pray for those who are burdened with problems too heavy to bear by themselves. Draw them up out of the pits of desolation and depression, and set their feet again on solid ground. May they find in Jesus Christ a sure foundation for their lives. We pray for those who face death, and for those encumbered with sorrow at the loss of one held dear. We pray for the sick and those weakened by pain. As Jesus worked wonders, making persons whole, may we in Christ's name surround the sick with healing ministries of comfort and care. Let our comfort convince them that they do not suffer alone. Let our care provide for their dignity despite their disabling condition.

We pray for ourselves and for those offering prayers on behalf of others. Put a new song in our mouths and your praise on our lips. We delight to do your will; may your law remain in our hearts. As we speak of your faithfulness before all of your people, continue to multiply your wonderful deeds in our midst.

And now as Christ...

Charlie Busby - Prayer

Jacks - Sister

Stamps - grandparents

Bills Moller - Hymns

Bee Johnson -

Dotted Band -